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UNCLAS HANOI 000219

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PINS VM

SUBJECT: MFA update on some detainees of concern

Ref: A. FBIS JPP20030109000137 B. HCMC 052  
- C. 02 HANOI 3096

1. (SBU) In response to inquiry from poloff on January 28, Ministry of Foreign Affairs International Organization Department Senior Expert Hong Bich Lien provided updates on the status of several prominent activists whose detentions have sparked international and USG concern. She promised on January 29 to provide further information about reported detentions of three relatives and one associate of Father Nguyen Van Ly.

2. (SBU) Pham Que Duong and Tran Van Khue: Ms. Lien confirmed that Duong and Khue are under investigative detention (refs b and c), without disclosing their current location(s). She added that the investigation was for "transmitting secret documents abroad" and for "receiving money from outside (overseas) for their activities." A January 9 Foreign Ministry public statement (ref a) had confirmed that the two were under detention, but only characterized them as "caught redhanded while carrying out activities that seriously violate Vietnamese laws." Ms. Lien stated categorically that Pham Que Duong's wife was not/not under detention. She promised to check whether anyone else had been detained along with Duong after poloff noted a report that police had detained a third person, Ho Thu, along with Duong and his wife (ref c).

3. (SBU) Pham Hong Son: Ms. Lien said that she believed that Son's case had gone to the Procuracy, indicating that a trial may take place soon after the Tet holidays. Poloff cited reports about Son's difficulties in obtaining legal representation. Ms. Lien agreed to send a note to the Procuracy enquiring about his case, especially whether Son has now been able to hire a lawyer.

4. (SBU) Nguyen Vu Binh: Ms. Lien had no information about Binh, confessing that she was handling so many inquiries that she had lost track of his case. She promised to check with either the Ministry of Public Security or the Procuracy about Binh's current status.

5. (SBU) Le Chi Quang: Embassy also asked MFA to check on the status of Quang in prison, especially in regard to his health, access to medical treatment, and prison conditions.

6. (SBU) Comment: MFA/IO's willingness to provide some information is welcome, even if the news is not encouraging. The apparent charges against Duong and Khue are especially worrisome, as they suggest probable heavy sentences.  
BURGHARDT